



Access AmeriCorps

Disability Inclusion Policy

Mission

Volunteer Tennessee encourages individuals with physical or intellectual disabilities to participate as AmeriCorps members through AmeriCorps programs operating in the state. We encourage a diverse membership that includes people with disabilities to participate as national and community service members through our many programs.

Definition of Disability

According to the Americans With Disabilities Act, the term "disability" means, with respect to an individual, a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more of the individual's major life activities, a record of having such an impairment, or being regarded as having such an impairment. "Major life activities" means functions such as caring for oneself, performing manual tasks, walking, seeing, hearing, speaking, breathing, learning, working, etc. Additionally, a "qualified individual with a disability" is an individual with a disability who, with or without reasonable accommodations, meets the essential eligibility requirements for the receipt of services or the participation in programs or activities provided by the program.

Policy

Under Federal law, any program that receives federal funds is required to comply with the requirements of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act. In compliance with the Federal law, all AmeriCorps programs prohibit any form of discrimination against persons with disabilities in recruitment, as well as in service. No qualified individual with a disability shall, by reason of disability, be excluded from participation in or be denied the benefits of the program, services, or activities of the program, or be subjected to discrimination by the program. Nor shall the program exclude or otherwise deny equal services, programs, or activities to an individual because of the known disability.

Reasonable Accommodation

A reasonable accommodation is any modification or adjustment to a program site that will enable a qualified applicant or AmeriCorps member with a disability to participate in the application process or to perform essential service functions.

Reasonable accommodation also includes adjustments to assure that a qualified individual with a disability has rights and privileges in service equal to those of individuals without disabilities.

All AmeriCorps programs shall make reasonable accommodations in practices and/or procedures when the accommodations are necessary to avoid discrimination on the basis of disability. Accommodations are "reasonable" when they are practical or feasible. The program does not have to provide reasonable accommodations that would impose undue hardship on the operation

of the program. According to the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC), an undue hardship must be based on an individualized assessment of current circumstances that show that a specific reasonable accommodation would cause significant difficulty or expense.

Procedure for Requesting Reasonable Accommodation Funds

Reasonable accommodation reimbursement grants were first made available to AmeriCorps State and National grantees in 2014 to make it easier for members with disabilities to fully participate in all aspects of national service. In the first reasonable accommodation reimbursement grant application period, CNCS reimbursed organizations for accommodations for American Sign Language interpreting for members who are deaf to attend orientation, training, and conduct meetings. CNCS also reimbursed grantees for the cost of products such as modified office equipment for members with physical disabilities requiring adaptive office products.

Things to know about the process:

It is important to understand that by applying for reasonable accommodation reimbursement grants, you are requesting to be reimbursed for expenses incurred. CNCS will not make advance payments to cover expenses.

The reasonable accommodation grant funds are available on a noncompetitive basis and requests are processed in the order they are received.

CNCS and Volunteer Tennessee encourage you to determine what each of your service members' accommodation needs are for the service term so you can submit requests for reimbursement. Requests for reimbursement of a single expense can be submitted at any time. If you intend to request reimbursement for multiple expenses throughout the year, your initial request must estimate what your total reimbursable expenses will be.

Grantees must retain and be prepared to provide documentation for each member for whom reasonable accommodation grant funds are requested. The documentation must show that:

- The goods or services needed to provide the reasonable accommodation were procured in conformance with the procurement standard specified in 2 C.F.R. 200.317 – 200.326; and
- Verification by the member that the accommodation was provided.

To submit an application:

Please send an email to Shannon Duke, Volunteerism & Training Manager, at shannon.duke@tn.gov that contains the information listed below. This information must be in a Word document in order to comply with Section 508 requirements:

- Name of Organization (consistent with the name of your organization in eGrants)
- Organization's contact person for request: Name, telephone number, and email address
- Type of disability for which an accommodation has been provided
- Type of accommodation for which reimbursement requested

- A statement of how the accommodation helps the member achieve full participation in their service assignment(s)
- The amount of reimbursement being requested
- A statement of whether this is a one-time request or a quarterly request for multiple reimbursements.

You must also attach to the email your documentation of the claimed reimbursement, such as copies of a contract and/or invoice and evidence of payment of the expense. This documentation does not need to be in a Section 508 compliant format.

NOTE: Do not include Personally Identifying Information (PII) in your request.

NOTE: Submission of this application for reasonable accommodation grant funds serves as a certification by the Grantee that the AmeriCorps member for whom the accommodation funds are sought has a disability as defined in the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). (“A person has a disability if they have a mental or physical impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activities.”)

You are not required to obtain documentation that the service member has a disability if the disability is apparent.

You should obtain documentation from a medical or rehabilitation expert to better understand the need for the reasonable accommodation for service member requests where a disability is non-apparent or the accommodation request is not straightforward. These professionals can also verify that someone meets disability status.

Resources for Finding Reasonable Accommodations:

The process of selecting the accommodation should be an interactive collaboration between the AmeriCorps member, his or her supervisor, and program managers. Free technical assistance regarding disability accommodation is available through the Job Accommodation Network: www.askjan.org

Many individuals with disabilities may be clients of the Department of Vocational Rehabilitation, an agency that exists in each state, dedicated to training and supporting people with disabilities in search of gainful employment. It is worth exploring whether the member you are arranging accommodations for has a rehabilitation plan or whether they have access to equipment and services through Vocational Rehabilitation because of their affiliation with the agency. www.tennessee.gov/humanservices/topic/vocational-rehabilitation

Each state also has an Assistive Technology program which can assist with information and referral, loan, and technical assistance questions. <http://tn.gov/humanservices/topic/ttap>